

Michigan Time Traveler

An educational supplement produced by Lansing Newspapers In Education, Inc. and the Michigan Historical Center.

KIDS' History

Trains, Brooms and Marionettes

Today's Time Traveler explores the history of toys—trains, brooms and marionettes—made right here in Michigan in good times and hard times.

Toys and Games Through Time

Michigan toys and games are fun. They stimulate our imaginations and sometimes prepare us for adult work. They often reflect the times people lived in.

In all societies and all times, people have played with toys and games. In hunting and gathering societies children often chased bugs and small reptiles with miniature spears. Thousands of years ago, people played with a board game resembling chess and checkers in Babylon, stone marbles in Egypt, stone yo-yos in Greece and kites in China.

Pioneers in the 19th century made farming toys that helped children learn how to work with animals. The chicken feeder toy taught children the rounded sweeping gesture necessary for casting grain to the chickens. The climbing bear toy taught children that the bear only climbs the rope when the child masters the firm, rhythmic downward pulls necessary for milking a cow successfully.

In the 20th century different toys helped children discover who they were and what jobs they might have when they grew up. Companies often directed their advertising specifically to girls, such as the Susy Goose Toys, or boys, such as Lionel trains.



Children from Dansville Elementary School try using the climbing bear and the chicken feeder toy in the Rural Michigan Gallery.

At the Michigan Historical Museum

See how many different kinds of toys and games you can find in the galleries at the museum. How are they similar or different from your toys or games?

The Michigan Historical Museum is located two blocks west of the Capitol in downtown Lansing. Museum admission is free. Hours: Monday-Friday: 9 a.m.-4:30 a.m.; Saturday: 10 a.m.-4:00 p.m.; Sunday: 1-5 p.m. Telephone hotline: (517) 373-3559. Visit the Michigan Historical Museum's Web Site: <http://www.michiganhistory.org>

Things To Do:

On-Line:

- For more history about Lionel trains: <http://www.lionel.com/CentralStation/Findex.cfm>
- See the Smithsonian's Lemelson Center for Study of Invention and Innovation <http://inventionatplay.org/>
- See *Thanks for the Memories* a special on-line tour at the Michigan Historical Museum: <http://www.michiganhistory.org/museum/explore/museums/hismus/special/memory/index.html>
- For an in-depth time line of the history of toys and games, visit: <http://www.historychannel.com/exhibits/toys>

In the newspaper: Find advertisements in the newspaper for toys and games. What kinds of toys and games are advertised now? Do we still think some things are for boys and some for girls?



Lansing Newspapers In Education (NIE) provides *Lansing State Journal* newspapers and supplemental teaching materials for area classrooms at little or no cost to the schools. The newspaper becomes a "living textbook," providing students with timely and relevant topics for discussion in class and at home.

If you are interested in sponsoring classroom papers or using the newspaper in your classroom, please contact Patricia O'Hearn, NIE Manager at (517) 377-1242.

Keeping House with Susy Goose Toys

These are images from a 1968 Susy Goose catalog of housekeeping toys. (Michigan Historical Museum)



This Susy Goose broom is in the collections of the Michigan Historical Museum.



The story goes that Paul A. Jones, Sr. who lived in Jonesville, Michigan, had been making household brooms and brushes when he met a toy-maker, Henry Katz, from New York. They decided to work together to make housekeeping toys and began Susy Goose Toys in Jonesville in 1929.

They made a variety of house cleaning sets in pinks and yellows, including a child version of the Bissell carpet sweeper. The Bissell Company was in Grand Rapids. Susy Goose Toys also made brooms, dustpans, dustmops, a vacuum cleaner with a soft motor sound, aprons, dishwashing sets and laundry sets.

In the 1950s, Susy Goose Toys moved into a brick building that had been a buggy factory and then Deal Automotive Works. Initially, it had difficulty expanding its business. Then, Susy Goose Toys was licensed by Matell to make items for its doll line, and the Michigan company enjoyed new success. Eventually, the toys were phased out as the company turned to custom plastic moldings.



Toys in Hard Times

Even during the Great Depression of the 1930s, when some people didn't have money, jobs or food, relief programs recognized how important it was to have toys. In Manistee in 1934, one relief program got permission to make toys for 800 children.

Relief organizer Louise V. Armstrong wrote, "Even workers employed on other projects, including a good many of the men in boots, came to me and offered their services without pay. We tried to let them all have a chance at the work, because we wanted as many as possible to feel that they had had a share in the Christmas spirit of our Santa Claus workshop."

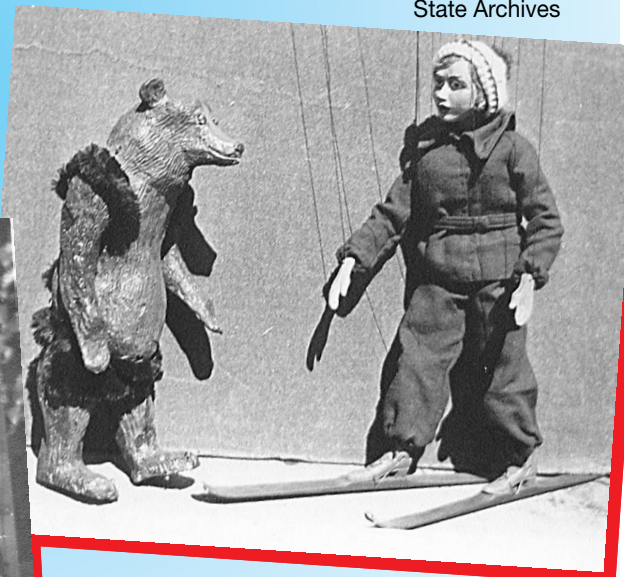
The Federal government developed more relief programs. One was the National Youth Administration (NYA) that provided training to unemployed young people and part-time work for needy students. In the Manistee NYA program, students learned from adults how to make marionettes, to manipulate them and produce puppet shows. They also worked with adults to repair toys for the Salvation Army to distribute to children.



State Archives



State Archives

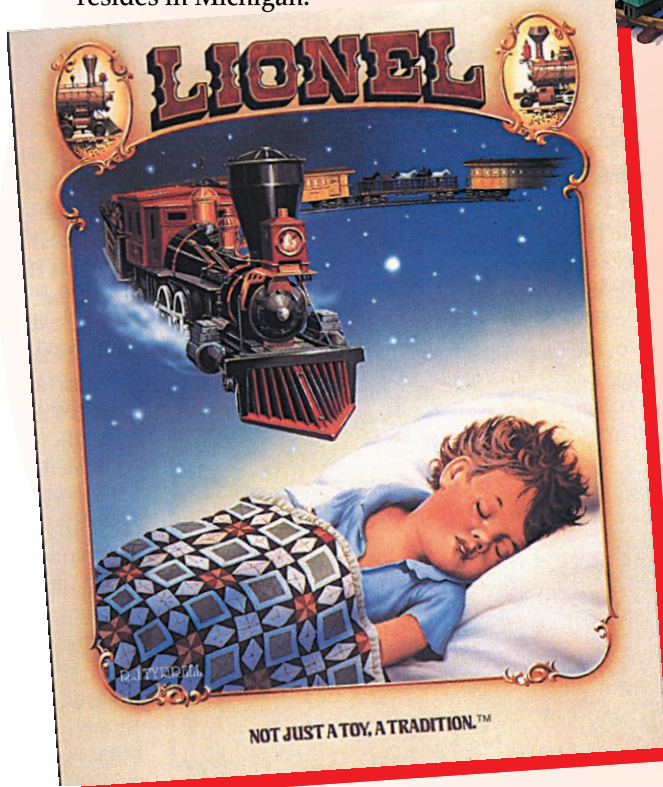


State Archives

These were some of the marionettes made in Manistee.

The Magic of Trains

For more than one hundred years, Lionel trains have been a favorite toy. Originally founded in New York City in 1900 by inventor Joshua Lionel Cowen, the company now resides in Michigan.



This poster captured the essence of the message of Lionel trains. (Michigan Historical Museum)



The North Pole Railroad made by Lionel has delighted young and old for more than a century. (Michigan Historical Museum)

Cowen designed his first train, the Electric Express, not as a toy but as a display for selling toys. Demand soon turned the train into a toy.

In 1971, Lionel moved to Mt. Clemens, Michigan, but the company experienced hard times. In 1986, Richard P. Kughn, a real estate developer in Detroit who loved toy trains from the time he was seven years old, bought Lionel Trains. The sales and quality of the trains improved dramatically.

Kughn once talked about his passion for toy trains. "I was walking home from school on trash day. There was a trash barrel out in front of a house with a train sticking out on top. I didn't know much about trains or toys trains at the time, but it intrigued me so I pulled all the pieces out, including the tracks and the transformer. I took it home and my dad helped me clean it up. We worked on it and put it on the ping-pong table in the basement and it ran."

Kughn said "If you're happy in what you're doing, in creating, putting things together, watching things happen in front of your eyes because of your efforts, it makes you smile... and time goes by rapidly when you play with toy trains—that's happiness."

In 1995, Kughn sold the company. Today it is located in Chesterfield, Michigan.